

Of Ecclesiastical Principalities

It remains now only to reason about ecclesiastical principalities. All difficulties regarding them come before they are possessed, because they are acquired either by virtue or by fortune and are maintained without the one or the other, for they are sustained by orders that have grown old with religion, which have been so powerful and of such a kind that they keep their princes in the state however they proceed and live. These alone have states, and do not defend them; they have subjects, and do not govern them; and the states, though undefended, are not taken from them; the subjects, though ungoverned, do not care, and they neither think of becoming estranged from such princes nor can they. Thus, only these principalities are secure and happy. But as they subsist by superior causes,¹ to which the human mind does not reach, I will omit speaking of them; for since they are exalted and maintained by God, it would be the office of a presumptuous and foolhardy man to discourse on them. Nonetheless, if someone were to inquire of me how it came about that the Church has come to such greatness in temporal affairs despite the fact that, before Alexander, the Italian powers, and not only those that are called powers but every baron and lord, even the least, held her in low esteem in temporal affairs—and now a king of France trembles at her and she has been able to remove him from Italy and to ruin the Venetians—though this is known, it does not seem to me superfluous to recall a good part of it to memory.

Before Charles, king of France, came into Italy,² this province was under the power of the pope, the Vene-

1. Lisio and Bertelli read a singular "cause."

2. Charles VIII, in 1494.

tians, the king of Naples, the duke of Milan, and the Florentines. These powers had to have two principal concerns: one, that a foreigner not enter into Italy with arms; the other, that none of them enlarge his state. Those who concerned them the most were the pope and the Venetians. And to hold back the Venetians the union of all the others was needed, as in the defense of Ferrara; to hold down the pope they made use of the barons in Rome. Since these were divided into two factions, Orsini and Colonna, there was always cause for quarrel³ between them; and standing with arms in hand under the eyes of the pontiff, they kept the pontificate weak and infirm. And although a spirited pope, like Sixtus,⁴ sometimes rose up, still fortune or wisdom could never release him from these inconveniences. And the brevity of their lives was the cause of it; for in the ten years on the average that a pope lived, he would have trouble putting down one of the factions.⁵ If, for instance, one pope had almost eliminated the Colonna, another one hostile to the Orsini rose up, which made the Colonna rise again, and there would not be time to eliminate the Orsini.

This brought the temporal forces of the pope to be held in low esteem in Italy. Then Alexander VI arose;⁶ of all the pontiffs there have ever been he showed how far a pope could prevail with money and forces. With Duke Valentino as his instrument and with the invasion of the French as the opportunity, he did all the things I discussed above in the actions of the duke. And though his intent might not have been to make the Church great, but rather the duke, none-

3. lit.: scandal.

4. Sixtus IV (1414-84), pope from 1471 to 1484. NM said of him in *Florentine Histories* VII 22: "This pontiff was the first who began to show how much a pontiff could do and how many things previously called errors could be hidden under pontifical authority."

5. See NM, *Florentine Histories* I 23 (end).

6. NM omits Innocent VIII, pope from 1484 to 1492 between Sixtus IV and Alexander VI (who was pope from 1492 to 1503).

theless what he did redounded to the greatness of the Church. After his death, the duke being eliminated, the Church fell heir to his labors. Then came Pope Julius, and he found the Church great, since she had all Romagna, had eliminated the barons in Rome, and had annihilated those factions through the blows struck by Alexander; Julius found the path still open to a mode of accumulating money, never used before Alexander.⁷ These things Julius not only continued but increased; and he thought about how to gain Bologna for himself, eliminate the Venetians, and expel the French from Italy. All these enterprises succeeded for him, and with all the more praise, inasmuch as he did everything for the increase of the Church and not of some private individual. He also kept the Orsini and Colonna parties within the same limits in which he found them; and although there might be some head among them ready to make a change, still two things restrained them: one, the greatness of the Church, which frightened them; the other, not having cardinals of their own, for they are the origin of the tumults among them. Nor will these parties ever be quiet as long as they have cardinals; for cardinals nourish parties, within Rome and without, and the barons are forced to defend them. Thus, from the ambition of prelates arise disorders and tumults among the barons. His Holiness Pope Leo,⁸ then, has found this pontificate most powerful; one may hope that if the others made it great with arms, he, with his goodness and infinite other virtues, can make it very great and venerable.

7. Apparently the sale of ecclesiastical offices or indulgences.

8. Leo X. Giovanni de' Medici, son of Lorenzo de' Medici, pope from 1513 to 1521.